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ABSTRACT

One approach to the development of writing skills at the upper high school level involves modeling, objectivity, revision, and editing. Modeling requires the teacher to reproduce one major writing assignment so that students can observe directly how the teacher attacks the assignment, completing it within the same time frame as they themselves must. Objectivity means reducing subjective reaction to writing assignments by having students use a secret number or symbol to identify papers, refusing to read rough drafts or make indepth suggestions during the initial composition stage, and assigning each paper two grades--one on mechanics and one on content. Revision requires students to show that they have written at least one rough draft on which they have made visible corrections, and editing involves the exchanging of student papers, with students correcting them and offering suggestions. (HOD)

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MORE

A classroom approach to the development of writing skills at the upper high school level.

MORE is an acronym for modeling, objectivity, revision, and editing as an adjunct to any advanced writing course. The first two activities are teacher initiated; the last two require student input. A consideration of each activity separately will show how implementation can enhance a composition program for college-bound juniors and seniors, regardless of the text or type of discourse being taught.

Modeling

Each time the teacher makes a major writing assignment, one which will occupy as much as three hours of class time, she will reproduce it for the students, writing one class period a day. If, for example, she is teaching three composition classes per day, two of the three periods allotted to this activity can still be used to assist students while the other is set aside for undisturbed composing. The benefits are numerous. Students may observe directly how the teacher attacks the assignment and completes it within the same time frame as they themselves must. The finished product - typed, photocopied, and exchanged on the due date - should inspire confidence in the instructor's ability to perform as well as to assign. In addition, the student receives an exact replica of the required composition, something few texts have adequate space to provide.

CS 208 762

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Objectivity

Reducing subjective reaction to writing assignments is one of the most difficult areas for the composition teacher. It is virtually impossible not to be swayed by such things as correctness, neatness, compatibility of ideas, and especially the name on the paper. To minimize this, the teacher can do at least three things: have students use a secret number or symbol rather than a name to identify papers: refuse to read complete rough drafts or make in-depth suggestions for improvement during the initial composition stage: and assign each paper two grades, one on mechanics, the other on content. A conference with each student not satisfied with the grade assigned will also clear the air.

Revision

To receive credit for the assignment, students must show that they have written at least one rough draft on which they have made visible corrections. This must be stapled on top of the final copy and may include more than one preliminary draft for which they will receive additional consideration. This (these) rough draft(s) should be messy. Usually, the messier the rough draft, the better a paper will be. Students receive packets at the beginning of the year which contain check sheets to be used in correct papers, and their attention to these lists of errors to be avoided will be duly noted in the grading process.

Editing

Before making a final copy of the corrected paper in ink (double spaced to allow for teacher comments), each student must have another in the classroom read his rough draft and make suggestions. The student editor then signs his name at the top of the rough draft to show it has been read and commented on, thus making it "fair copy." Students are required to exchange with someone across the room to help preclude identification of the writer (see objectivity, above). The teacher need save rough drafts only when glaring errors or inconsistencies have been ignored either by writers or editors. Student editors are required to use editorial check sheets on which to record their comments and are encouraged to circle any mechanical errors with red pens. Both check sheets and pens are included in student packets.

Personal Application

I teach advanced composition to college-bound seniors during the first semester. The course is divided into three segments with roughly a six weeks period being allotted to each. The first six weeks exposition is emphasized, using a filmstrip program and selected text resources. Each week a different method of developing expository material is employed, which means that I write six assignments to exchange with students, examples of which are available with this presentation.

The second six weeks is devoted to short, persuasive papers, using as a text The Lively Art of Writing (Payne). Again, approximately six assignments are written by students and modeled by the teacher. Examples included with this presentation are annotated to show the method of thesis development used. The final six weeks of the term are given over to the short research paper. Since the type of research paper we do is based on a debatable thesis, the shorter persuasion papers serve as a suitable training exercise. The development of both is basically the same: the longer paper is merely documented and the premise substantiated. Because of the technical difficulties of this assignment and the additional counseling with students that it requires, I make no attempt to write along. I do, however, have a paper previously written as an example which is duplicated for students and included in their materials at the beginning of the six weeks. Pamphlets and handouts are the teaching instruments for this portion of the course. Because of the special demands of the research paper, students have their rough drafts examined by the teacher separately before the papers are typed and turned in. Also, the use of a title page, including the student's name and classroom period, does not allow for the anonymity which I find so helpful in other situations. Otherwise, this is longer but basically no different than any other composition and is approached in much the same manner.